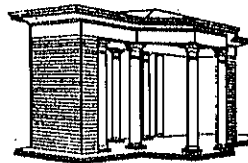


BRITISH REBELS AND REFORMERS

HARRY ROBERTS

*WITH
8 PLATES IN COLOUR
AND
18 ILLUSTRATIONS IN
BLACK & WHITE*



WILLIAM COLLINS OF LONDON

MCMXXXII

GENERAL EDITOR
W. J. TURNER

★

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BRITAIN IN PICTURES
THE BRITISH PEOPLE IN PICTURES

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THE FAMILY OF SIR THOMAS MORE
Engraving by Christian von Merkel after Holbein, 1527

REBELS AND REBELLIONS

This little book is about rebels and reformers, rebellions and reforms. A few of the outstanding rebellions in our history have been selected as examples, in order to throw light on the causes which make men rebel, and on the kind of men and women who give form and force to what might otherwise begin and end in futile discontent. It would, of course, be absurd to attempt in so few pages to give more than a mere epitome of the social grievances, popular uprisings, political innovations, and ameliorative reforms that make up so large a part of English history.

Recent events have probably convinced many who read this book that rebels, even when revolutionary in aim, are not necessarily evil, or evil-dispositioned men. It was a distinguished Christian minister who said that "all our liberties are due to men who, when their conscience has

compelled them, have broken the laws of the land"; and Emerson pronounced the profound *caveat* that "good men must not obey the laws too well." Some of the wisest, bravest and noblest of our race have been rebels; but do not let us jump to the conclusion that rebel is just another name for hero. Many a rebel, even in what we now believe to have been a good cause, was in essence a gangster, whilst vanity and abnormal desire for personal power have been the driving forces that have impelled many men to play a leading part in the removal or remedying of crying evils and injustices.

Great popular uprisings hardly ever occur when the bulk of the people are in a state of abject material want. Individual crime may in such times be common; but the personal needs are so urgent that the delay inherent in organised action effectively bars successful rebellion. Nearly all the great popular revolts in England have taken place when the majority of working people, or at least a big section of them, were, or lately had been, doing fairly well. Then, suddenly, they have felt that attempts were being unjustly made to lower their standard of living or that of their class. I think that history shows us that it is love of justice rather than of riches, rather even than of liberty, that stirs the average Englishman to action. After all, as Lord Hugh Cecil reminded us more than thirty years ago, justice is the one abstract possession to which every human being, the savage as well as the civilized, the child as well as the adult, is entitled. In fact, the great majority of the individuals actually taking part in a movement such as the Peasants' Revolt in the fourteenth century, could not have found words to express the motives impelling them. But they were conscious that they and their class were being treated unfairly, so that even the abstract teachings of the Lollard priests and other idealists found a ready echo in their hearts.

One thing that strikes the student of the great popular revolts of past centuries is the much more intimate relation between politics and religious sentiments obtaining in earlier days, than existed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. At the same time, it is interesting to note that the great national revolutions that have taken place in Europe in the present century have had their roots in creeds which, though dogmatic and not strictly "rational," are devoid of theology, and hostile to the ethical codes associated with the current religions of the churches. Mediæval communism, such as that of Wycliffe, was, of course, at base less crudely material in ideal and aims than is the Marxian doctrine which we, in this country, are only just beginning to take seriously. Karl Marx, in a famous aphorism, said that "religion is the opium of the people"; but we have only to look a little deeper to find striking similarities, even identities, between the psychology of the disciples of dogmatic theology and that of typical contemporary Marxian communists.

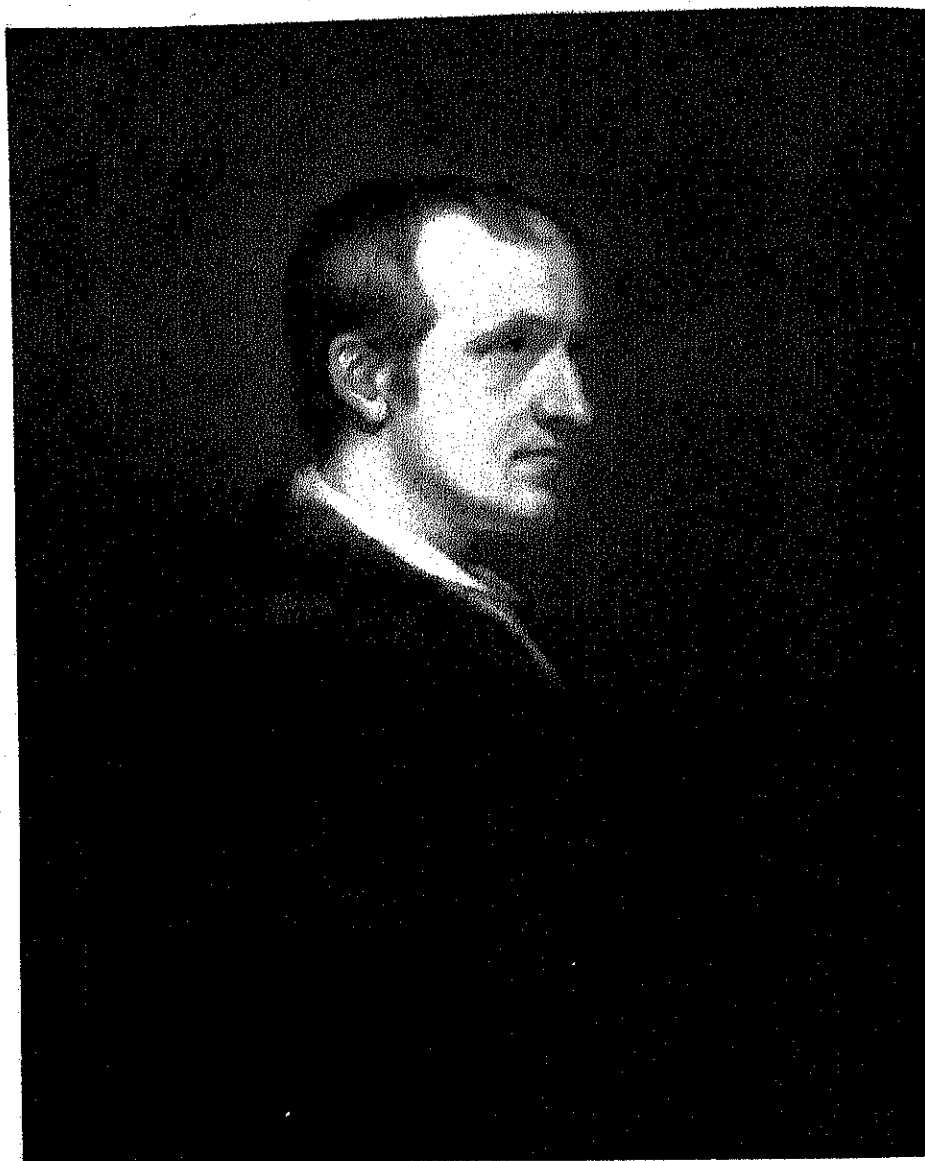


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SIR THOMAS MORE, 1478-1535

Chalk drawing by Holbein





By courtesy of the Trustees of the National Portrait Gallery, London

WILLIAM GODWIN, 1756-1836
Oil painting by James Northcote

Since the Industrial Revolution, the class war has been almost entirely an economic and political one. If we leave out of account the well-meaning protests of the so-called Christian Socialists, Kingsley, Maurice and their few followers, religion and social politics have been, until recently, regarded and treated as two distinct and unrelated human concerns. Conventional Christianity's appeal has been for charity rather than for justice.

Most of the popular uprisings dealt with in the following pages were backed by the use, or threatened use, of physical force—in fact they partook of the quality of civil war. It is difficult to see what other course was open to the overwhelming majority of the people. The laws were made by a richer minority whose interests more often than not were opposed to those of the working people. This small ruling class, moreover, had at its disposal and obedient to its orders, forces which it never hesitated to use to secure the carrying out of those laws, however iniquitous. In later chapters, brief reference is made to social reforms, introduced and carried into effect by what we call constitutional means—that is with at least the passive consent of the majority of the people. Indeed, nearly all the material ends for which the rebels of earlier centuries fought, often without apparent success, have later been realised without the striking of a blow. It may, however, be doubted whether such belated victories would have been won had the ruling minority not been aware of the existence of much dangerous inflammable material, needing but a match to set it alight. The practical disappearance of serfdom after the suppression of the revolt of the peasantry in the fourteenth century, the enactment in the nineteenth century of the principal demands of the Chartists, who themselves were routed by the forces of the Government, are obvious examples.

We, Britons, living in the middle of the twentieth century, are equipped with a democratic representative governing body, in the selection of the members of which practically all of us, both men and women, have equal voice. This parliament considers and publicly discusses every sort of plan, constructive or destructive, sound or unsound; and grievance, real or unreal. It alters laws and makes new laws; and, at short intervals, its members, if they are to continue as such, must again be chosen by free citizens as competent trustworthy representatives of the people and of the people's wishes. For all practical purposes, our system of rule is that of a parliamentary democracy. It is not disloyal to say that the best or the worst king would make but little difference to the laws enacted or the laws amended. It may seem, therefore, that there is no further use for, or meaning in, resort to a physical-force revolution in order to achieve social or economic reform. The best planned armed revolt could do no more than could constitutional power fully exercised by an educated parliamentary democracy.

But a wise democracy takes into account, not majorities only, but minorities also. It has been said that majorities are never right ; it were more truly said that few majorities have all the truth, and therefore all the right. Parliamentary democracy does ensure that anything or any grievance about which the majority of the people feel strongly shall be seriously considered and, if remedy be practicable, put right. But a member of parliament is not voted for or against on one issue only. For instance, he may not, nor may the majority of the electors, take seriously, or have any views on an issue which to me, or to other individuals, may seem the most important thing in the world. Will parliamentary democracy satisfactorily deal with my case ?

Again, unless the ruling majority is wise enough to legislate not only for those, and in the interests of those, who support them, but also for those who conscientiously differ from them, passive resistance, persecution and general disharmony will result. The average voter "casts his vote," perchance, as he thinks right ; but he is not vitally concerned that that right should prevail. He is willing to leave it to the majority. Its obligation, therefore, never exceeds that of expediency. Even voting for the right is *doing* nothing for it. As Thoreau put it, such people "at most, give only a cheap vote and a feeble countenance and God's speed to the right as it goes by them."

Unfortunately, the people have often been led to believe that in seizing power they are merely seizing their rights. Experience has taught them that in practice "rights" have again and again been assumed to appertain only to those who rule. If political democracy knows little better than to copy the misrule against which its ancestors fought, it in turn is likely to be faced by well justified rebellion. Too rarely has it been pointed out to the people that, in assuming power, they are coincidently taking on responsibilities. There is no future for democracy unless the people improve on the autocrats and oligarchs who have preceded them, not only in intention, but in methods and achievements also. Democracy did not save Athens when the people ceased to put men of honour and ability in office. The true problem for the ruler of a country—whether he be hereditary king or anointed of the people—is how best to secure the fullest life possible for every man, woman and child in that country. The absence of that aim is responsible for nearly all the rebellions and discontent, some expressions of which are briefly described in the following pages.



JOHN BALL'S SERMON TO THE PEASANTS
Illumination from Froissart's *Chronicles*

THE PEASANTS' REVOLT

Behind any extensive popular uprising, there is nearly always a real or imagined economic grievance. At the same time, we do not find that the extremely poor, those who have been socially and financially downtrodden for generations, readily respond to appeals to rebellion. Those who play active parts in a revolt are rarely actuated by one and the same motive. Several factors are involved in creating the atmosphere in which active revolt thrives. So it was with the so-called Peasants' Rebellion of 1381, which has been described as the only spontaneous popular rising on a grand scale that our history presents. Certainly, it was the first British example of a truly class war between the commons and the nobility—the workers and their masters.

At that time the great majority of the people of England made their living by agriculture. The land was distributed and, in a partial sense, owned under a modification of the feudal system. The manor house

was a kind of mansion, contrasting favourably with the farm-houses and huts of the tenants and villeins. The land immediately around it was enclosed, and kept in his own hands by the lord of the manor, though cultivated by the tenants and sub-tenants. Over the rest of the manorial estate, the various classes of tenants held rights as nearly absolute in the legal sense as those of the lord of the manor himself. The majority of these tenants were so-called villeins, who held anything from twenty to forty acres, in return for which they devoted part of the week to work on the lord's demesne; the amount of labour demanded by way of rent varying according to the custom of the several manors. Rarely had a villein to devote to the cultivation of the lord's land more than two or three days a week, from sunrise to three o'clock.

Comparatively soon after the Norman invasion, some of the more successful villeins persuaded their superior landlords, in lieu of manual service, to accept a money or goods payment. This was a great step towards personal freedom—indeed, towards increased freedom on both sides. It put the villein in a position to bargain for the sale of such of his services and time as he might be prepared to devote to the cultivation of land other than his own. It enabled the lord to hire the labour he needed when he most wanted it. It was also good for the poorer manorial "tenant," as it gave him a chance of putting in time and earning wages.

In the middle of the fourteenth century, England, in common with the rest of Europe, was devastated by repeated attacks of the epidemic disease which we now call "plague." Chaucer and Langland refer to it as the "Pestilence," and it was later spoken of as the Black Death, so lethal were its effects. The population of the country at this time has been estimated at from three to five millions, and of these it is said that at least a million and a half perished. Naturally, there were not enough men left alive adequately to cultivate the land, with the inevitable result that higher wages were demanded by the labourers, including those who had exchanged their former villein service for a money rent. Wages in many cases more than doubled.

At this period, the Commons had practically no direct voice in the government, and took no part in the formulation of laws. Their only political weapons were those of the strike and of direct physical revolt. In 1349, immediately after the first and gravest epidemic of plague, the King and Parliament enacted a law, the first Statute of Labourers, which provided that "every person under sixty years of age who does not live by merchandise, exercises no craft, who has no means of his own, or proper land for his occupation in tillage, and who is not serving any particular master, shall be bound to serve in husbandry whoever may require him, at the wages customary" before the visitation of the "great plague." Any labourer who struck work was to be imprisoned, and anyone who took higher than the old wages was subject to a penalty amounting to

twice the sum taken. Moreover, labourers were forbidden to leave or change their employment without their masters' permission. This caused ill-feeling between the two classes. A labourer refusing to work at the old wages was to be imprisoned for fifteen days; if he left his parish, a writ for his recovery was to be sent to every sheriff in England; if he was caught, he was to have the letter "F" burnt into his forehead. This effort on the part of the barons to keep down wages, however, failed utterly; as did subsequent statutes, in spite of the much more severe penalties they imposed.

If there was discord in the secular world, there was discord no less pronounced within the Church, in which financial corruption was wide-spread. In the Middle Ages, the Church was far more actively involved in, and concerned with, the financial and social arrangements of the nation than it has been in England in later centuries; indeed, so pronounced were the Church's territorial interests and so selfishly were they often pursued, that not infrequently they came into material conflict with the interests of the tenant peasantry, thus increasing an already growing resentment.

In, or about, the year 1322, an important event occurred. In a Yorkshire village was born a boy, John Wycliffe, who was destined later to play, mostly behind the scenes, a great part in determining the course of English history and of the line of development of our special type of democracy. His name is chiefly associated with the fight against clerical worldliness, and he condemned the material prosperity of the Church, which was destroying its spiritual character and its spiritual influence. Wycliffe objected to all endowments and advocated apostolic poverty for all the clergy. He was the author of a thesis *De Dominio Civili* in which he enlarged on the text that Dominion, or civil lordship, is founded on Grace. So long as this maxim was thought to have a special application to the French Pope, whose claims on England and English benefices were constant, few people in this country but accepted it. When, later, it was made clear that the doctrine applied equally to lordships at home, hostility rapidly grew, even within the Church; for the monasteries had absorbed into their possession something like one-third of the land of England. Wycliffe then took steps to spread his views among the people; and founded a new order of free-lance "poor priests," who were to move from district to district, dressed in garments of coarse brown wool. They quickly won the confidence of the working people, who welcomed their



JOHN WYCLIFFE
Earliest known portrait.
Woodcut, 1548



'WHEN ADAM DELVED AND EVE SPAN
WHO WAS THEN THE GENTLEMAN'
Illumination from a 14th century English MS
of the *Pentateuch*

semi-communistic teaching — that all men are equally subject to God's will, and dependent on God's grace for such power and privilege as they could justly claim. The propaganda of these "hedge priests" was largely responsible for the state of mind in which the roots of the Rebellion of 1381 took hold. Emphasis was laid by both Wycliffe and his followers on those basic doctrines of Christianity which embodied the ideas of fundamental equality, and the conditional tenure of private property. Many of the Lollards, as Wycliffe's followers came to be called, held and preached views on private property little differing from those of true communism.

It should be borne in mind that, materially, the condition of the labourer at this time was comparatively good. It was the enactment of the Statutes of Labourers and the attempt to impose a uniform poll-tax on the whole population that provided the central body of heat which the pleadings of the Wycliffe preachers easily blew into a flame. Among these preachers, one name stands out and has survived in history—that of John Ball. Whether he was an actual apostle of Wycliffe or a free-lance preacher of communism is comparatively unimportant. Unfortunately, nearly all contemporary records of the Peasants' Revolt and of the events that led up to it were written by honest or dishonest supporters of the established Church and nobility. But it seems that this "crazy priest of Kent," as they termed him, had behind him three-quarters of the labourers of eastern, midland and southern England. His addresses to the people were based on the text :

"When Adam dalf and Eve span
Who was then the gentilman?"

An elaborate underground "V" system of communication was established between the leaders and their followers. Messages such as these were continually arriving in every country place, however remote "John Ball greeteth you all : and doth for to understand he hath rung your bell : now right and might, will and skill : God speed every dele."

And again :

"Johan the Miller hath y-grownde smal, smal, smal ;
The Kynge's sone of heavene shalle paye for alle :
Be ware or ye be wo ;
Knoweth your frende from youre foo ;
Haveth ynowe and scythe 'Hoo,'
And do welle and bettre, and flethe synne,
And seketh pees, and holde thereynne ;
And so biddeth Johan Trewman and alle his felawes."

Froissart gives us an unsympathetic report of one of Ball's sermons or addresses :

"There was an usage in England, and yet is in divers countries, that the noblemen hath great franchise over the commons and keepeth them in servage, that is to say, their tenants ought by custom to labour the lords' lands, to gather and bring home their corn, and some to thresh and to fan, and by servage to make their hay and to hew their wood and bring it home. All these things they ought to do by servage, and there be more of these people in England than in any other realm. Thus the noblemen and prelates are served by them, and especially in the county of Kent, Essex, Sussex and Bedford. These unhappy people of these said countries began to stir, because they said they were kept in great servage, and in the beginning of the world, they said, there were no bondmen, wherefore they maintained that none ought to be bond, without he did treason to his lord, as Lucifer did to God ; but they said they could have no such battle, for they were neither angels nor spirits, but men formed to the similitude of their lords, saying why should they then be kept so under like beasts ; the which they said they would no longer suffer, for they would be all one, and if they laboured or did anything for their lords, they would have wages therefor as well as other. And of this imagination was a foolish priest in the country of Kent called John Ball, for the which foolish words he had been three times in the bishop of Canterbury's prison ; for this priest used oftentimes on the Sundays after mass, when the people were going out of the minster, to go into the cloister and preach, and made the people to assemble about him, and would say thus : 'Ah, ye good people, the matters goeth not well to pass in England, nor shall not do till everything be common, and that there be no villeins nor gentlemen, but that we may be all united together, and that the lords be no greater masters than we be. What have we deserved, or why should we be kept thus in servage ? We be all come from one father and one mother, Adam and Eve : whereby can they say or show that they be greater lords than we be, saving by that they cause us to win and labour for that they dispend ? They are clothed in velvet and camlet furred with grise, and we be vested with poor cloth ; they have their wines, spices and good bread, and we have the drawing out of the chaff and drink water ; they dwell in fair houses, and we have the pain and the travail, rain and wind in the fields ; and by that cometh of our labours they keep and

maintain their estates ; we be called their bondmen, and without we readily do them service, we be beaten ; and we have no sovereign to whom we may complain, nor that will hear us and do us right. Let us go to the king, he is young, and show him what servage we be in, and show him how we will have it otherwise, or else we will provide us of some remedy, either by fairnes or otherwise.' ”

The preaching of John Ball and other disciples of Wycliffe found ready acceptance, not only among the disgruntled peasantry, but also among craftsmen, artisans, apprentices and small tradesmen. The imposition of certain new taxes seems to have been the final or operative spark which set the whole thing ablaze. Within a few days, practically all Kent and Essex were on the march for London.

Leaders, probably already chosen, took command ; one of the most celebrated being an experienced ex-soldier, called Wat Tyler, who headed the men of Kent. Although at first this people's army was orderly and relatively peaceful in method, certain rougher elements were soon attracted, with the result that many rich men's houses were destroyed, many lawyers and crown officers killed, manor rolls burnt and prisons broken open.

The first great meeting-place in London was at Mile End. The Londoners gave the rebels warm welcome, and little was done to hinder them from destroying the palace of John of Gaunt, the much hated uncle of the king and one of the principal ministers. Much the same fate overtook the Law Courts and the legal buildings at the Temple. An invitation was then sent to the boy king, Richard, asking him to come to Mile End to hear and discuss the people's grievances. He decided to do so, although the nobles and rich merchants who surrounded him were not of his mind. He behaved with courage and boldness, and it was probably this courage that, by “appeasing” the milder elements among the rebels, prevented the complete success of the insurrection. In Froissart's words :

“ When the king and his other lords were there, he found there a three-score thousand men of divers villages and of sundry countries in England ; so the king entered into them and said to them sweetly : ‘ Ah, ye good people, I am your king : What lack ye ? What will ye say ? ’ Then such as understood him said : ‘ We will that ye make us free for ever, ourselves, our heirs and our lands, and that we be called no more bond nor so reputed. ’ ‘ Sirs, ’ said the king, ‘ I am well agreed thereto. Withdraw you home into your own houses and into such villages as ye came from, and leave behind you of every village two or three, and I shall cause writings to be made and seal them with my seal, the which they shall have with them, containing everything that ye demand ; and to the intent that ye shall be the better assured, I shall cause my banners to be delivered into every bailiwick, shire and country. ’

“ These words appeased well the common people, such as were simple and good plain men, that were come thither and wist not why.

They said : ' It was well said, we desire no better.' Thus these people began to be appeased and began to withdraw them into the city of London. And the king also said a word which greatly contented them. He said, ' Sirs, among you good men of Kent ye shall have one of my banners with you, and ye of Essex another, and ye of Sussex, of Bedford, of Cambridge, of Yarmouth, of Stafford and of Lynn, each of you one : and also I pardon everything that ye have done hitherto, so that ye follow my banners and return home to your houses.' They all answered, how they would so do : thus these people departed and went into London. Then the king ordained more than thirty clerks the same Friday, to write with all diligence letters patent and sealed with the king's seal, and delivered them to these people ; and when they had received the writing, they departed and returned into their own countries : but the great venom remained still behind, for Wat Tyler, Jack Straw and John Ball said, for all that these people were thus appeased, yet they would not depart so, and they had of their accord more than thirty thousand."

The following morning the king, having heard mass at Westminster, set out towards London. Thinking to by-pass the city to the north, he turned left, only to run into the trouble he had hoped to avoid. Mindful, perhaps, of his spectacular personal success of the previous day, he no sooner saw the multitude of people than he " rested and said how he would go no further till he knew what these people ailed, saying, if they were in any trouble, how he would rappease them again. The lords that were with him tarried also, as reason was when they saw the king tarry. And when Wat Tyler saw the king tarry, he said to his people : ' Sirs, yonder is the king : I will go and speak with him. Stir not from hence without I make you a sign.' And therewith he spurred his horse and departed from his company and came to the king, so near him that his horse's head touched the croup of the king's horse."

What followed is reported variously by different historians ; but it seems clear that Tyler, a turbulent-mannered ex-soldier, either picked, or allowed himself to be drawn into, a quarrel with certain of the king's following and was killed.

Wat Tyler's death, which was falsely rumoured to have occurred in the course of an attack on the king's person, effectively split up the remaining body of the rebels. Moreover, the alleged attack on the king turned many Londoners from neutrals to opponents of the movement. The forces that faced each other in Smithfield had all the makings of a pitched battle. The king, however, sent three knights to parley with the rebels, demanding the return of his banners, and offering mercy if they submitted peacefully ; and so many of them delivered their letters, but not all. Then the king made them to be all to-torn in their presence ; and as soon as the king's banners were delivered again, these unhappy people kept none array, but the most part of them did cast down

their bows and so brake their array and returned into London." An order was issued that anyone found in London on the Sunday morning following, who had not dwelt there for one year, should be taken as a traitor and lose his head. This dispersed the remaining rebels, though John Ball and Jack Straw were found in hiding—according to Froissart, betrayed by their own men—and beheaded. Later, the king's forces went through the country, hunting down the leaders of the rebellion in town after town. In most cases, these men were handed over by their fellow townsmen, for the price of an indemnity for the rest of those involved. All the king's letters were surrendered and destroyed. Froissart says that, in this "clean-up," more than fifteen hundred men were hanged or beheaded.

Although the Peasants' Revolt was repressed, and nominally failed, and although a number of courageous people seemingly died in vain, yet, in fact, nearly everything for which the rebels had fought was granted in the course of the next few decades. So it has happened in history again and again. Villeinage became practically extinct within a generation, in spite of King Richard's threat: "In bondage shall you abide; and that, not your old bondage, but a worse."

The first half of the fifteenth century has been called the golden age of the English labourer. All attempts to enforce the Statute of Labourers in the reigns of Henry IV, Henry V, Henry VI and Henry VII failed. The general standard of life was low, but the economic difference between the classes was much less than in the periods before and after. There were plenty of grievances, both political and economic, but these were by no means confined to the peasants and labourers. Each section of the people had its distinct grievance: heavy taxation, the appointment of upstarts to high office, interference with elections, the constant robbing of the people by the king's servants, the general national mismanagement and dishonesty. It was in 1450 that the commons of Kent rose under the command of the very capable leader known as Jack Cade, found by the Primate (*pace* William Shakespeare) to be "sober in talk and wise in reasoning; though arrogant in heart and stiff in opinion." Cade, with 46,000 men, assembled on Blackheath; it is said that "eighteen esquires, seventy-four country gentlemen, and many a yeoman and some five ordained church ministers, followed to the camp. From Sussex two stout priests and landowners, the Abbot of Battle and the Prior of Lewes, twenty-three country gentlemen, with yeomen, bailiffs, and clerks from Lewes, Seaford and Pevensey were all on their way to join the rising of the commons. From eight Sussex parishes came every man available." King Henry VI, with an army, moved on Blackheath. Cade withdrew his army to Sevenoaks, where he routed the King's men, and afterwards came to London and occupied Southwark. The welcome of Cade and his followers in London was hearty and general; the citizens declared him

free to enter the city and handed the keys into his keeping ; and he crossed London Bridge with all his forces. At sundry places, the leader made proclamation in the King's name "that no man, on pain of death, should rob or take anything perforce without paying therefore." In the days following, numerous oppressive ministers and their favourites were publicly beheaded, the heads of some of the more prominent of these being carried on



A 15TH CENTURY BUILDER
Woodcut from Caxton's *The Game of Chesse*, c. 1474

poles to London Bridge. A few days later, a foolish demand, amounting to robbery by force, made by Cade on a rich citizen of London who had treated him with great hospitality, caused a wholesale revulsion in public opinion which, within a couple of days, became hostile to the rebels.

Then, all discipline among them having vanished, the rebels made for home. A price was set on Cade's head : a writ and proclamation by the King was issued "willing and commanding that whosoever taketh him and bringeth him, quick or dead, to the King or to his Council, shall have 1,000 marks for his labour truly paid him, without fail or delay." "And so Alexander Iden, a squire of Kent, took him in a garden in Sussex, the thirteenth day of July ; and in the taking of him he was hurt, and he died the same night, and on the morrow he was brought into the King's Bench, and after he was drawn through London, and his head set on London Bridge."

THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY AND AFTER

The fifteenth century was a comparatively prosperous one for the majority of English people, including those that worked on the land. A new mercantile class was developing, but trade with foreign countries was as yet on too small a scale materially to divert the course of agriculture. Soon after the beginning of the next century, however, things began to go awry, especially for the peasantry and the country labourers. The Wars of the Roses had reduced the power of the feudal nobility, but had had little effect on the welfare of the workers. It was in 1509 that Henry VIII came to the throne. The numerous continental wars and

expeditions in which he engaged were very expensive, and the large sums of money required were raised partly by taxation, partly by widespread spoliation. About a quarter of the land of the country was held by the monasteries, and one of the "merry monarch's" earliest acts was to confiscate the property of the Church and farm it out to favourites, to make what they could out of it. The laws were modified to make things financially easier for the new landowners, who soon found that, with the growing demand for wool from continental manufacturers and its consequent increasing price, coupled with the much higher wages which the half-emancipated farm labourers claimed, it would be more immediately profitable to turn arable land into pasture and so make it feed a larger number of sheep and a smaller number of men and women. In spite of the many abuses to which some of the monasteries lent themselves, the poorer folk had, up to this time, been able in times of trouble to count on a generous measure of help from the Church. This help was, of course, no longer available.

Another means employed by the King to raise money for his various schemes—not a few of which, it must be allowed, were in the national interest—was the dangerous one of debasement of the currency. As always happens in such cases, prices rose, whilst wage-rates either remained stationary or rose far more slowly than the rate of the inflation. That many of the grievances of the peasantry were genuine ones is obvious from contemporary writings, and from the sermons of the celebrated Bishop Latimer.

Hugh Latimer, who was born about 1485, was the son of a small Leicestershire farmer. On leaving Cambridge, where he was distinguished by his scholarship, he was given, by Thomas Cromwell, a church living in Wiltshire. He soon became known as a bold, eloquent and politically heterodox preacher; uncompromising in his denunciation of ecclesiastical abuses and social injustice. He had first-hand knowledge of the matters of which he spoke, and did not mince his words in telling of the wrongs done to the people by the "graziers, inclosers and rent-rearers." These, in the first sermon preached by him before the young King Edward VI, he denounced, as hinderers of the king's honour—the king's honour standing in the number and prosperity of his people. "For," he said, "where as have been a great many householders and inhabitants, there is now but a shepherd and his dog." The yeomanry, he said, were becoming slaves, together with the clergy. "We of the clergy had too much; but that is taken away, and now we have too little. For mine own part," said the Bishop, "I have no cause to complain, for I thank God and the King, I have sufficient . . . but I know them that have too little. I know where there is a great market-town, with divers hamlets and inhabitants . . . and the vicar that serveth, being so great a cure, hath but twelve or fourteen marks by year: so that of this pension he is



HUGH LATIMER, BISHOP OF WORCESTER, 1485[?]-1555
Engraving by Passe from Holland's *Heroologia*, 1620

not able to buy him books, nor give his neighbour drink ; all the great gain goeth the other way."

Latimer's account of his father's condition as a yeoman farmer, is put forward by him as an illustration of the hardships and evils arising from increased rents. His father, he says, was a yeoman, and had no land of his own, "only he had a farm of three or four pound by year at the uttermost, and hereupon he tilled so much as kept half a dozen men. He had walk for a hundred sheep, and my mother milked thirty kine. He was able, and did find the king a harness, with himself and his horse, while he came to the place where he should receive the king's wages. I can remember that I buckled his harness when he went unto Blackheath field. He kept me to school, or else I had not been able to have preached before the king's majesty now. He married my sisters with five pound or twenty nobles apiece ; so that he brought them up in godliness and fear of God. He kept hospitality for his poor neighbours, and some alms he gave to the poor. And all this he did of the said farm, where he that now hath it payeth sixteen pound by year, or more, and is not able to do anything for his prince, for himself, nor for his children, or give a cup of drink to the poor."

All these rent-raising and price advances, Latimer asserts, go to private persons and landowners; and though a lot was talked and preached about the abuses, nothing was done in the end. "Let the preacher," he says, "preach till his tongue is worn to the stumps, nothing is amended. We have good statutes made for the commonwealth, as touching commoners and enclosers; many meetings and sessions; but in the end of the matter there cometh nothing forth."

So outspoken a critic of those in high places had little room in his character for fear; and the manner of his death at the stake, consequent on his loyalty to conscience, and his last words to Ridley, who died with him, are among the finest historical examples of nobility and courage. Ridley, a very old man, showed signs of weakness as the fires were set to the faggots; when Latimer, looking to him across the flames, said: "Be of good cheer, Master Ridley; for we have this day lit such a candle in England as shall, with God's grace, never be put out."

Latimer, a fine example of the educated, somewhat insular-minded Englishman, had for a distinguished contemporary another type of Englishman, with equally wide sympathy and an equal hatred of injustice, but of cosmopolitan culture and with interests less immediate and more abstract—a prominent London citizen and barrister. This was Sir Thomas More. Reformer rather than rebel, More has had much influence on political thought—not always very apparent. The active spirits of rebellion are not always those who take the most prominent parts in the physical uprising. Successful revolts nearly always depend on a combination of the victims of oppression with intellectual or religious members of other classes, whose sense of justice is offended, though their own circumstances are outside the field of conflict. This by way of introduction to an event which took place more than a century after the Peasants' Revolt, the publication at Louvain in 1516 of Thomas More's book, *Utopia*.

More, besides being a well-known barrister, was a member of the House of Commons, where he spoke boldly against oppressive taxation. He held an important position at Court, was on intimate terms with Henry VIII, was knighted in 1521, became Speaker of the House of Commons two years later, and in 1529 succeeded Cardinal Wolsey as Lord Chancellor. He was, however, a keenly religious as well as a keenly studious man.

The sort of man More was, and the reality of his intellectual beliefs and moral convictions, may be gathered from a few outstanding facts. With no worldly ambitions and making no effort to hide his views on political, social and religious matters, he did his utmost quietly and unostentatiously to practise his profession and to spend his leisure unaffectedly in the simple domestic circle which his large family provided. He was on terms of intimate friendship with Erasmus and other leading

minds of Europe. He was unable to avoid being, as Erasmus put it, "dragged into the king's service." He wrote *Utopia* in the hope of making his political views and social criticisms plain to Henry VIII before he summoned him to his council.

Yet, while Erasmus was writing his *Christian Prince* for the instruction of Charles V, and More his *Utopia*, Machiavelli was writing his *Principe*, which had more immediate effect on the course of events than had the other two put together. It was *The Prince* which became the political textbook of Europe.

Although, as More shows in *Utopia*, his religious attitude was most tolerant, the sincerity of his own beliefs was such as to make his personal conduct unhesitating. He refused to co-operate in any way with Henry's determination to repudiate Rome in order that he might divorce his wife, Catherine of Aragon. Rather than compromise, he resigned the Lord Chancellorship and other posts, and retired on a small competency to live a quiet family life in Chelsea. Erasmus has described the life in this simple home, where study and thought and the laughter of children mingled.

"There he lives surrounded by his numerous family, including his wife, his son and his son's wife, his three daughters and their husbands, with eleven grandchildren. . . In [his house] is none, man or woman, but readeth or studieth the liberal arts, yet is their chief care of piety. There is never any seen idle; the head of the house governs it, not by a lofty carriage and oft rebukes, but by gentleness and amiable manners. Every member is busy in his place, performing his duty with alacrity; nor is sober mirth wanting."

More's *Utopia* is written in the form of a detailed account of an unknown state, visited by and reported upon by a sea-captain, Ralph



THE ISLAND OF UTOPIA
Woodcut from the 1st edition of *Utopia*, 1516

Hythloday. Its political theories and economic proposals are very much akin to the far vaguer and simpler teachings of Wycliffe and his followers ; one might say that More developed the ideas of Wycliffe and John Ball and put them into practical form. His pictures of life in the ideal state—if we allow for the local colour of the day—are curiously like those of an idealised communist state of our own time.

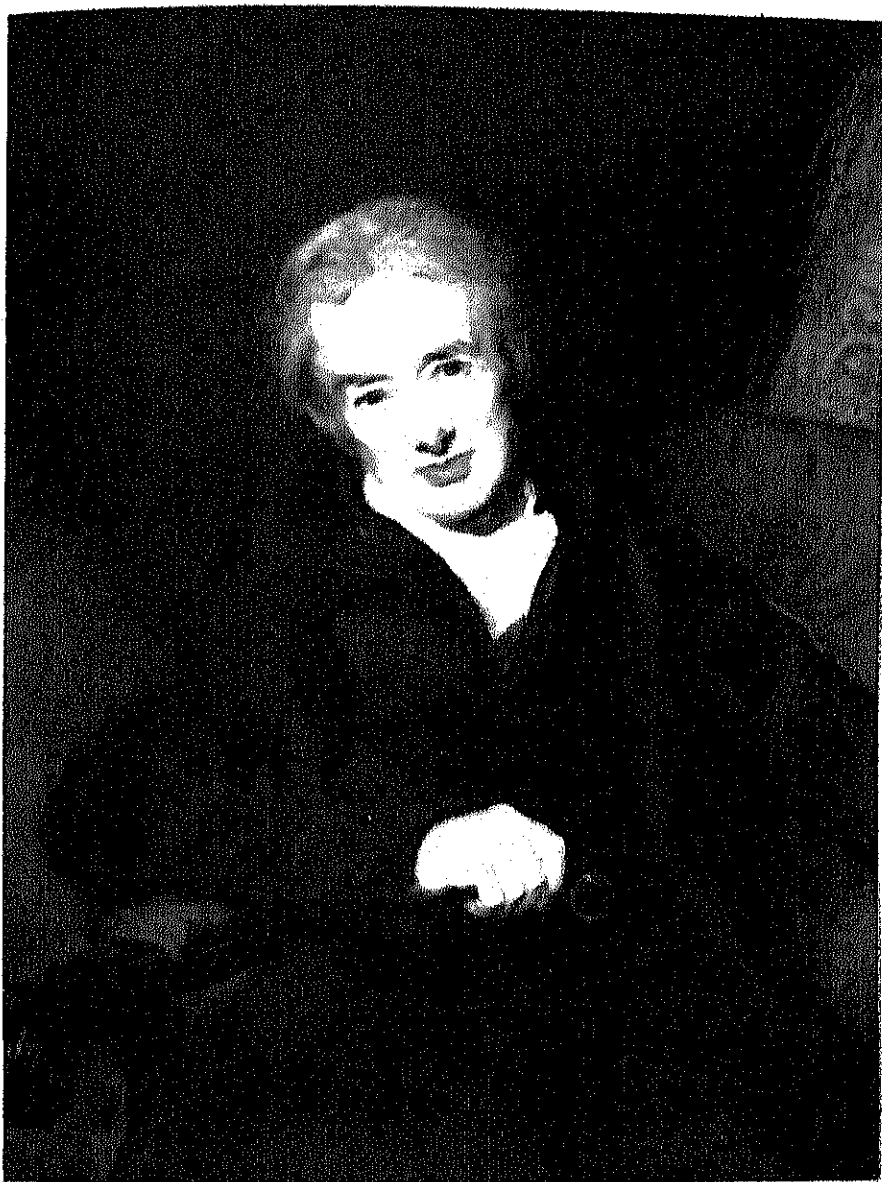
The Utopians held all things in common, and maintained that such a plan was the only one that truly deserved the name of a commonwealth.

“ For in all other places it is visible that whereas people talk of a commonwealth, every man seeks only his own wealth ; but that where no man has any property, all men do zealously pursue the good of the public ; and, indeed, it is no wonder to see men act so differently, for in other commonwealths, every man knows that unless he provides for himself, how flourishing soever the commonwealth may be, he must die of hunger ; so that he sees the necessity of preferring his own concerns to the public ; but in Utopia, where every man has a right to everything, they do all know that if care is taken to keep the public stores full, no private man can want anything ; for among them there is no unequal distribution, so that no man is poor, nor in any necessity ; and though no man has anything, yet are they all rich ; for what can make a man so rich, as to lead a serene and cheerful life, free from anxieties ; neither apprehending want himself, nor vexed with the endless complaints of his wife ? He is not afraid of the misery of his children, nor is he contriving how to raise a portion for his daughters, but is secure in this, that both he and his wife, his children and grandchildren, to as many generations as he can fancy, will all live, both plentifully and happily, since among them there is no less care taken of those who were once engaged in labour, but grow afterwards unable to follow it, than there is elsewhere for those that continue still at it.”

More speaks hotly of a government “ both unjust and ungrateful ” that is lavish to those who do no work or work at luxury trades, but takes little or no care of the common people, “ the meaner sort, such as ploughmen, colliers, and smiths, without whom it could not subsist ; but after he public has been served by them, and that they come to be oppressed with age, sickness and want, all their labours and the good that they have done is forgotten ; and all the recompense given them is, that they are left to die in great misery ” ; and he sums up in a way which, had he written in English, and had his book been read otherwise than as a mere study in theoretical politics, might have ended his career almost at its beginning.

Into the mouth of his narrator, Hythloday, he puts the frank statement :

“ Therefore I must say, that as I hope for mercy, I can have no other notion of all the other governments that I see or know, than that they are a conspiracy of the richer sort, who, on pretence of managing the public, do only pursue their private ends, and devise all the ways



By courtesy of the Council of St. John's College, Cambridge

WILLIAM WILBERFORCE, 1759-1833
Oil painting by George Richmond



By courtesy of the Provost and Fellows of Eton College

CHARLES GREY, 2ND EARL GREY, 1764-1845
As Prime Minister carried the Reform Bill of 1832
Oil painting by George Romney

and arts that they can find out ; first that they may without danger, preserve all that they have so ill acquired, and then, that they may engage the poorer sort to toil and labour for them, at as low rates as is possible, and oppress them as much as they please : and if they can but prevail to get these contrivances established, by the show of public authority, which is considered as the representative of the whole people, then they are accounted laws."

A few years after More's retirement from the Chancellorship, Parliament, anxious to secure the throne, insisted that all the King's subjects should swear fidelity to the succession of the children of Anne Boleyn, Queen Catherine having been divorced. All subjects were also ordered to take the oath of abjuration of the Pope. More declined to obey, and was tried and convicted of treason, and in 1535 was beheaded on Tower Hill.

On the death of Henry VIII, his nine-year-old son, Edward VI, became King, his uncle, the Duke of Somerset, holding sovereign power as Lord Protector. Somerset did his best to provide remedies for the economic troubles. He issued in the middle of the sixteenth century a proclamation which might almost have been drafted by Latimer or Sir Thomas More. Here are some extracts from it:

"The King, the Lord Protector's Grace, and the rest of the Privy Council, are advertized and put in remembrance, as well by divers supplications and pitiful complaints of the King's poor subjects, as also by otherwise and discreet men, having care of the good order of the realm, that of late by the enclosing of lands and arable grounds in divers and sundry places of the realm, many have been driven to extreme poverty, and compelled to leave the places where they were born, and to seek their beings in other countries with great misery and poverty ; inasmuch as in times past, ten, twenty, yea, in some places a hundred or two hundred Christian people have been inhabiting and kept household, to the bringing up and nourishing of youth and to the replenishing and fulfilling of his Majesty's realm with faithful subjects ; now there is nothing kept but sheep and bullocks.

"All that land which heretofore was tilled and occupied with so many men . . . is now gotten by insatiable greediness of mind into one or two men's hands, and scarcely dwelt upon by one poor shepherd. So that the realm thereby is brought to a marvellous desolation, houses decayed, parishes diminished, the force of the realm weakened, and Christian people, by the greedy covetousness of some men, eaten up and devoured of brute beasts and driven from their houses by sheep and bullocks.

"Wherefore His Highness is greatly moved both with a pitiful tender zeal to his most loving subjects, especially to the poor, which are minded to labour and travail for their livings, and forced to live an idle and loitering life, and of the most necessary regard to the surety and defence of his realm, which must be defended against the enemy with force of men and the multitude of true subjects, not with flocks of sheep and droves of beasts. . . . Therefore a view and enquiry is appointed to be made of all such as, contrary to the said acts and godly ordinances,

have made enclosures and pastures of that which was arable ground, or let any house, tenement or demesne decay and fall down."

That the Protector's sentiments were not those of the ruling classes generally, may be gathered from the wording of a contemporary statute the preamble of which set forth "that partly by the foolish pity and mercy of them that should have seen godly laws executed," the poor and unemployed had become troublesome. It was enacted, therefore, that:

"If any person shall bring to two justices of peace any runagate servant, or any other which liveth idly or loiteringly by the space of three days, they shall cause that idle and loitering servant or vagabond to be marked with a hot iron on the breast with the mark of V, and adjudge him to be slave to the same person that brought him for two years after, who shall take the said slave and give him bread, water or small drink, and refuse him meat; and cause him to work, by beating, chaining or otherwise, in such work as he shall put him to, be it never so vile: and if he shall absent himself from his said master, by the space of fourteen days, then he shall be adjudged by two justices of peace to be marked on the forehead, or the ball of the cheek, with a hot iron; with the sign of an S, and further shall be adjudged to be slave to his said master for ever."

In desperation, with no well-defined plan, the peasantry in certain counties revolted, only to be quickly suppressed by the superior force of the government. Robert Ket, a well-to-do tanner of Norwich, led 16,000 men in an insurrection of the peasantry of Norfolk and Suffolk, who demanded the abolition of the recent enclosures which had been made in those counties on an enormous scale. Ket's followers, who had taken the town of Norwich, were attacked by a government force under the Earl of Warwick, with the result that the rebel petitioners were defeated, and Ket was taken prisoner and hanged, though his followers were pardoned.

This was the last occasion on which the English peasantry, on anything but a trifling scale, rose in armed rebellion against the forces of the State. The practice of enclosing common land and small holdings continued through the following century; and local protests were numerous in the periods of the Stuart monarchy and the Commonwealth. Groups of idealists, such as the Levellers and the Diggers, associated with the names of John Lilburne and Gerrard Winstanley, were active in missionary efforts, though they had no big popular following. In 1649, a few disciples of Winstanley took possession of a plot of land at Walton, and another at Cobham, and cultivated them, in the hope of inciting landless people to do likewise. Needless to say, these little groups were easily dispersed; and even the peasantry were unresponsive to the semi-religious nature of the movements, the leaders of which were strongly opposed to any use of force or to anything that might be called "robbing from the rich."

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mediævalism. Usury was no longer a crime—indeed, at the end of the seventeenth century, a parson who preached against usury was deprived of his living. For the time being, at any rate, the mass of the working people were poorer than they were a couple of centuries earlier.

Although trade had become more important than ever before, agriculture was still the principal work of the country, and ownership of land the principal basis of wealth. Still, a ferment was at work, a ferment probably deriving from France, where the writings of Rousseau and others were affecting the ideas and the moral emotions of the thoughtful, and thus preparing the way for the revolution which matured at the end of the eighteenth century. In this country, also, revolutionary changes in the economic structure of the nation were close at hand.

THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION AND POLITICAL REFORM

From the beginning of the nineteenth century until the present time, the personnel of the forces at economic variance has changed. All trace of feudalism has disappeared. The differences in social status and in political influence have been generally accepted, and disputes between employers and employed have been for the most part over the questions of money and hours. Any social philosophy comparable with the communism of many schools of mediæval Christianity has, until very lately, failed to win the support of more than a few cultivated idealists. Yet, as always, among the outstanding personalities of nearly every revolt or revolution—no matter how material the interests and aims of the militant leaders and of the more vocal of the insurgents—has been a small number of idealists, whose ultimate influence has, time and again, markedly affected the final outcome.

“No idea has excited greater horror in the minds of a multitude of persons, than that of the mischiefs that are to ensue from the dissemination of what they call levelling principles. They represent to themselves the uniformed and uncivilised part of mankind as let loose from all restraint, and hurried into every kind of excess. Knowledge and taste, the improvements of intellect, the discoveries of sages, the beauties of poetry and art, are trampled under foot and extinguished by barbarians.”

This short passage is from a book, published but a few years after the French Revolution, which stirred the philosophic minds of England more immediately and, for a time, more profoundly than perhaps any other book of its class, published before or since. That book was William Godwin's *Political Justice*. Hazlitt tells us that the book had such an instant effect that “Tom Paine was considered for a time as a Tom Fool to him : Paley, an old woman : Edmund Burke, a flashy sophist. Truth, moral truth, it was supposed, had here taken up its abode, and these

were the oracles of thought." De Quincey says that Godwin's work "carried one single shot into the bosom of English society, fearful, but momentary. Mr. Godwin advanced against thrones and dominations, powers and principalities, with the air of some Titan slinger or monomachist from Thebes and Troy, saying, 'Come hither, ye wretches, that I may give your flesh to the fowls of the air.'"

To us, reading *Political Justice* to-day, it seems almost unbelievable that so abstract and "reasonable" a moral treatise should cause such widespread alarm. Godwin's philosophy is a strange blend of individualism, anarchism and communism. His mind was not a very original one; but he wrote easily and well—he has been described as "a first-rate journalist." He presented the doctrines of the Encyclopædists, of Rousseau, and of the other theorists of the French Revolution, in a mixture which made an immediate appeal to contemporary young intellectuals, including Southey, Wordsworth, Coleridge and—a little later—Shelley. Four years after the first publication of *Political Justice*, a daughter was born to Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, the authoress of the *Vindication of the Rights of Women*; and in the same year, Mary Wollstonecraft herself died. Godwin's character seems to have gone to bits from this time on, and Leslie Stephen has written that Godwin "lived in the eighteenth, and only survived in the nineteenth century." In 1836, when he was eighty years old, he died.

By the end of the eighteenth century, the agricultural labourer had lost practically every one of the ancient rights which had given him an established position on the land. Beyond that afforded by the wages which a farmer or a landowner was willing to give him, he had no economic status as an Englishman. His freedom of movement was more circumscribed than that of industrial wage-earners, owing to the numerous Acts of Settlement which forbade him to leave his parish. Hitherto, in addition to the wages which he earned by labour on the land of a richer neighbour, he might run on the common land his cow, his geese and his hens, and from the woodland glean pretty much all the firing he needed. Moreover, from the strip of arable land which he was entitled to cultivate for his own benefit, a considerable part of the vegetables needed by his family were available without purchase. One after another of these ancient privileges or rights were taken from him; and so broken did he become that, after the seventeenth century, we find no rebellions or uprisings of the peasantry comparable with those of the fourteenth and later centuries. The miniature outbreaks that occurred from time to time were soon repressed with pitiless effectiveness by the new class which had secured control of the nation.

Still, in county after county, cornstacks, barns and farm buildings were burnt by bands of incendiaries, and thrashing machines and other machinery were destroyed by the "Luddites"; whilst the Combination

Laws made peaceful methods of protest impracticable ; as illustrated by the case of the Dorsetshire labourers—now known to history as the Tolpuddle Martyrs—who were transported for an attempt to secure a living wage by trades union action. The workers in every branch of industry were forbidden to combine for the purpose of raising wages or shortening hours of labour. Here, for instance, are some of the comments of the judge at the trial of certain compositors, prosecuted by the *Times* in 1810 for taking part in a strike :

“ Prisoners, you have been convicted of a most wicked conspiracy to injure the most vital interests of those very employers who gave you bread ; and, as far as in you lay, to effect their ruin. The frequency of such crimes in men of your class of life, and their mischievous and dangerous tendency to ruin the fortunes of those employers which a principle of gratitude and self-interest should induce you to support, demand of the law that severe example should be made of those persons who shall be convicted of such daring and flagitious combinations.”

The judge thereupon sentenced them to terms of imprisonment varying from nine months to two years. Fifteen years later, the Combination Laws were repealed.

During the early years of the nineteenth century, economic and social changes were taking place, directly consequent on scientific and mechanical inventions and their application to industry. From being almost entirely an agricultural nation, England increasingly became a manufacturing one. Lancashire and Yorkshire became the centres of a new mechanised world, the inhabitants of which had few mutual social or economic traditions. This industrial population was composed of two distinct and fundamentally hostile classes—employers and employed, capitalists and workers, masters and men.

The *Edinburgh Review*, in 1810, stated :

“ The great body of the nation appears to us to be divided into two most violent and pernicious factions : the courtiers, who are almost for arbitrary power ; and the democrats, who are almost for revolution and republicanism. . . . That the number of democrats is fast increasing with a visible and dangerous rapidity, any man may satisfy himself by the common and obvious means of information. It is a fact which he may read legibly in the prodigious sale, and still more prodigious circulation, of Cobbett's *Register*.”

The mention of Cobbett draws attention to the fertility of the years just before and just after the French Revolution in the production of rebels and social reformers, of the most varied kinds, many of them capable of exercising powerful influence on their fellows by reason of their capacity as speakers, writers or leaders. To William Godwin reference has already been made ; of Robert Owen we shall speak later ; but first, some reference must be made to William Cobbett, a man fundamentally greater, more individual, more characteristically English, and

more a rebel at heart than either of the other two. To say that Cobbett was characteristically English does not imply that he was a typical Englishman; probably he differed from his contemporaries as much as he differed from the majority of Englishmen to-day. He was born in 1762, near Farnham in Surrey. His father was a small working farmer, his grandfather an agricultural labourer. To Cobbett, England seemed to have a character, a tradition, a personality, as distinct as are the qualities of individual men and women. He believed that a policy for England should be a genuine English policy. He was essentially a countryman; but the England which he had in mind, which he loved, was an England already changing in his youth—almost crushed by the time he began to talk about it.



ROBERT OWEN
Water colour by Augustus Hervieu, 1829

What mattered to Cobbett was the preservation of those ways of living, those individual liberties and those personal characteristics which are peculiar to England—the things which are the expression of the national genius. He was about the most prolific writer of his day, and the most vigorous, not to say violent. Although it would be absurd to describe a man so volcanic in temperament, so pugnacious in disposition, and so superficially fickle in his enthusiasms—even while constant in his basic ideals—as peaceful and forbearing, he appealed to the Luddites to give up their attacks on machinery and to join the movement for Parliamentary reform. He contended that a popularly elected Parliament, representing an informed democracy, could soon put an end to the sinecures, the debased currency, the borough-mongering, and the “Bank and Stock-Exchange jobbery” which, he held, were mainly responsible for the poverty and hardships of the workers. In 1810, he was prosecuted for publicly protesting against the flogging, by hired German soldiers, of some young men at Ely in what was called the “local Militia,” who had refused to march without the “marching guinea” which an Act of Parliament awarded them. For this, he was imprisoned in Newgate

for two years, fined a thousand pounds, and held in heavy bail for seven years after the expiration of the imprisonment. In 1831, he was again prosecuted for trying to rouse discontent in the minds of the labourers, and he made a defiant speech in his defence. The jury disagreed, and he was discharged. Four years later he died, at the age of seventy-three.

Very different from those of Cobbett were the personality and career of another contemporary, also dissatisfied with the current trend of social politics in England. Robert Owen, born in 1771, was the son of an ironmonger in a small town in central Wales. At the age of ten, he was apprenticed to a draper in Lincolnshire and, subsequently, was assistant in a drapery house in Manchester. At eighteen, he set up in business for himself, having borrowed an initial capital of a hundred pounds. He was so successful that he was invited to take full charge of a cotton manufactory, in which five hundred workers were employed. At the age of twenty-eight, he became managing partner in the largest and best equipped spinning mill in Scotland ; and was widely known as a wealthy and successful business man.

Owen was not an original philosopher, nor was he temperamentally a rebel, like Cobbett. He was an even-tempered man of great character, and possessed of simple yet practical intellect. He had great sympathy with, and pity for, the new industrial workers, and was zealous in his efforts to secure an improvement in their economic position, their education, and their amenities generally. In his own factory, he paid higher wages and worked shorter hours than were customary; and he refused to employ children under ten years of age, whilst many rivals were employing children under six. He built decent houses for his employees, and the schools which he established at New Lanark had an almost world-wide reputation.

In fact, he did his best to apply the policy and principles expressed in his *New View of Society*, which was published in 1813. Owen may be said to have been one of the first advocates of factory legislation, and one of the earliest founders of the Co-operative movement, as well as a pioneer of the school of socialism with which Maurice and Kingsley were afterwards associated.

During the early years of the industrial revolution, the conditions obtaining were, indeed, in many cases, basically indistinguishable from those obtaining under the worst kinds of slavery. In one of his letters, written in 1833, Southey, speaking of labour in the factories, says : "The slave trade is mercy compared to it." The conditions and hours of work in most of the factories seem to us to-day to be almost unbelievable. "Though the majority of the children employed were nine years old or over, it was not uncommon to find in the mills children of six years of age ; there were many under seven, and still more under eight. A child of fourteen who wished to stop at eight o'clock in the course of a



WILLIAM COBBETT QUIT'S HIS AGRICULTURAL PURSUITS
TO BECOME A SOLDIER

Coloured etching by James Gillray

Illustration to *The Life of William Cobbett—written by himself*, 1809



By courtesy of the Leicester Galleries, London

'SHAFTESBURY, OR LOST AND FOUND'

Lord Shaftesbury, a 19th Century Philanthropist, was the founder of the Ragged Schools.
Water colour by W. MacDuff

sixteen-and-a-half hours day was compelled to go on under threat of dismissal. . . . Punishment, such as strapping or sousing in water, was not infrequently used to keep the children awake."

At first, the newly invented machines made a greatly increased demand on the supply of labour. Whereas, for instance, the cotton trade employed fifty thousand hands in 1760, that number had increased to one-and-a-half million in 1833. The steam engine and the power loom, however, brought about some startling changes. Between 1813 and 1820, the number of power looms in use increased from two thousand four hundred to fourteen thousand one hundred and fifty; and as a girl and a fifteen-year-old boy could look after four of them, doing nine times the work of one skilled weaver working with the hand-loom, the amount of labour displacement was immense. These machines could work day and night; and their owners made them work day and night, and did their best to compel the men, women and children they employed to do the same.

The immediate victims of this industrial slavery were so economically entangled as in most cases to be past offering resistance. Fortunately, however, in England—as, indeed, probably in all other countries—decent men and women are moved to protest against injustice and tyranny of which they themselves are not the direct victims. If these reformers and idealists happen to be, by reason of their genius, or their social or political position, what are called influential persons, their protests do not usually end in mere words. In the early decades of the nineteenth century, Britain produced many such followers of England's patron saint—slaying dragons and defying giants. In connection with the removal or lessening of the horrors and cruelties that accompanied the early years of factory employment, four names stand out—interestingly enough, the names of four men prominent in the political party which opposed the Reform Bill of the 1830's. These men were Richard Ostler, John Fielden—a labourer who became master of a factory and M.P. for Oldham—Michael Sadler, and Lord Ashley, who afterwards became the Earl of Shaftesbury.

It is impossible here even to summarise the essentials of the various Factory Acts, the first of which was passed in 1819.

In 1833, Lord Shaftesbury introduced a Bill limiting the week's work for those under eighteen years of age to sixty-eight hours; and in 1847 was carried a Bill which limited the labour of young people between the ages of thirteen and eighteen to twelve hours a day, allowing two hours daily for meals. This Bill applied to women as well as to boys and girls. In 1842 Lord Shaftesbury succeeded in getting an Act passed which forbade the employment of women and of boys under ten, underground in mines. It is not uninteresting that John Bright, "the People's Friend," characterised the Ten Hours Bill of 1847 as "one of the worst measures

ever passed in the shape of an Act of the Legislature"; so varied have been the views of freedom held by its professional defenders.

The fact that seemed, in the early years of the century, most strongly to impress the better educated artisans and the intellectual members of the better-to-do classes was that, as a result of the industrial revolution and of the prolonged Napoleonic wars, the rich were getting richer and the poor more deeply sunk in poverty and degradation. An increasing number felt that the first step necessary was a political one: the securing of parliamentary power and the making and amending of the country's laws. The demand for parliamentary reform grew to large proportions; and, in nearly every district of England, enormous and sometimes threatening crowds became more and more insistent. The French Revolution had shown how a united people can easily overthrow an unpopular government, no matter how long established. In October, 1830, the Birmingham Union had a dinner, at which some 3,700 persons were present, "to commemorate the recent glorious Revolution in France"; and the toast of "Honour, gratitude and prosperity to the noble people of France," was drunk among cheers. In an after-dinner speech, a well-known banker, Thomas Attwood, a strong supporter of parliamentary reform, said:

"We will go on in our peaceful and legal career, and by God's grace we will recover the liberties of our country—not by violence, anarchy or brute force, but by the peaceful, organised and magnificent display of the will of the people. When the barons of Runnymede recovered the liberties of England from the tyrant John, they took up the bow, and the spear, and the battle-axe, and the sword, and they were justified in so doing. Thank God, we have no occasion now to take up murderous and destructive weapons like these; the progress of education and knowledge has changed this state of things; our weapons are union, truth, justice and reason; our sword is 'the sword of the spirit,' which is the will of the people, and let no one doubt that this great moral sword is efficient for every just and useful purpose."

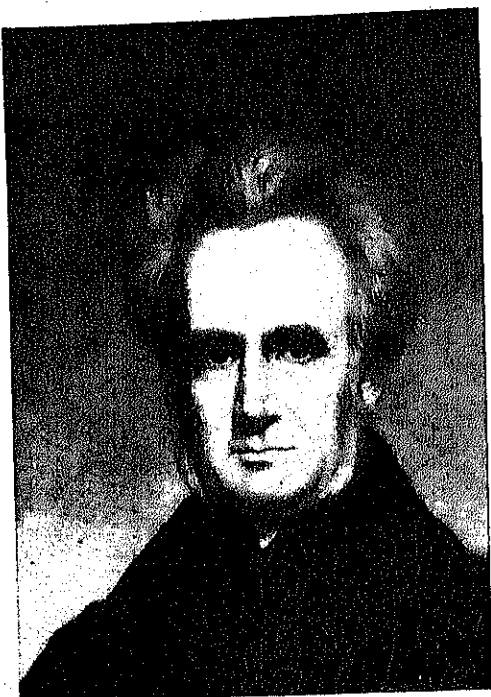
About a fortnight later, on the opening day of the new Parliament, the Duke of Wellington, the reactionary Prime Minister, made clear his own attitude to any attempts that might be made to reform Parliament. In the course of his speech he said:

"I am fully convinced that the country possesses at the present moment a Legislature which answers all the good purposes of legislation, and this to a greater degree than any Legislature ever has answered in any country whatever. The representation of the people at present contains a large body of the property of the country, in which the landed interests have a preponderating influence. Under these circumstances, I am not prepared to bring forward any reform measure; and I will at once declare that, as long as I hold any station in the government of the country, I shall always feel it my duty to resist such measures when proposed by others."



A FACTORY SCENE, 1840
Contemporary engraving

Thirteen days later, the Wellington Government was defeated, and immediately resigned. Earl Grey, who as Charles Grey, was a member of the society, "The Friends of the People," which had for its object a reform in the system of parliamentary representation, was sent for by the King and asked to form a government. The people took care to keep up pressure on their representatives. Place tells us that "meetings of almost every description of persons were held in cities, towns and parishes ; by journeyman tradesmen in their clubs, and by common workmen who had no trade clubs or associations of any kind. So numerous were the meetings which passed resolutions urging Lord Grey on, and pledging themselves in every way to support him, that the morning newspapers were compelled over and over again to declare their utter inability, not only to give accounts of the proceedings, but even in any way to take any notice whatever of an immense number of them." The Reform Bill was introduced into the House of Commons in March, 1831, and was given a second reading by a majority of one. But the following month the government was defeated, and Parliament was dissolved. The election sent back to Parliament a majority of over a hundred in favour of the Bill,



FRANCIS PLACE

Detail from the painting by S. Drummond, 1833

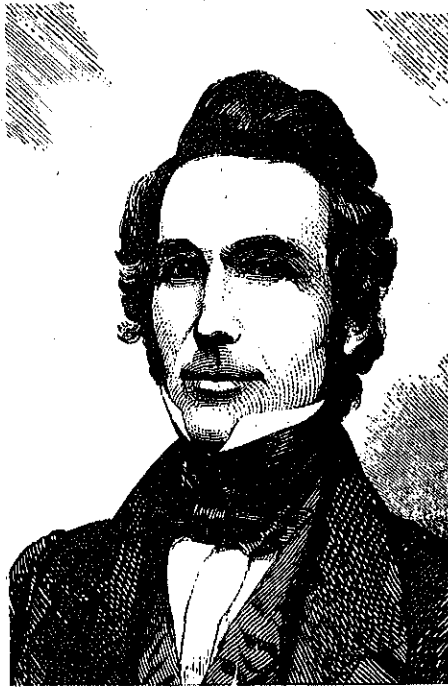
which Lord John Russell, on Midsummer Day, re-introduced. It passed the Commons, but was rejected in the House of Lords by a majority of forty-one. Naturally popular feeling rose high, and was further stimulated by the active efforts of Francis Place. He drew up a Memorial, and took a deputation to see Earl Grey, who received them at a quarter to eleven at night. In April, 1832, Earl Grey himself moved the second reading of a new Reform Bill in the House of Lords. It was carried, but with an amendment, which Grey had said he should regard as fatal to the Bill's success. Grey resigned. Sir Robert Peel declined office, and the Duke of Wellington failed to form a government. Once more the King sent for Earl Grey; but he refused to take office until

the King gave a written promise that he would "create such a number of peers as will be sufficient to pass the Reform Bill." On June 4th, 1832, the Reform Bill was finally enacted.

In spite of the great expectations of a large section of the working people, the Act added only about half a million to the number of electors. The well-to-do commercial classes became enfranchised, whilst the wage-earners of the country, who had agitated so enthusiastically and effectively for the passing of the Bill, were no better off than before. Indeed, as they very soon found out, their position was to become much worse. In 1834, the new Poor Law came into operation. This replaced the more considerate Poor Law of Elizabeth, and introduced the principle of deterrence, which aimed at making the condition of anyone seeking public relief worse than that of the meanest independent labourer. The workhouse, as described by Dickens, was introduced; and the whole administration of the Act was callous and inhuman in the extreme. The newly enfranchised middle-class seemed to have little thought for the welfare of the poor, whose numbers and enthusiastic support had won for them the suffrage.

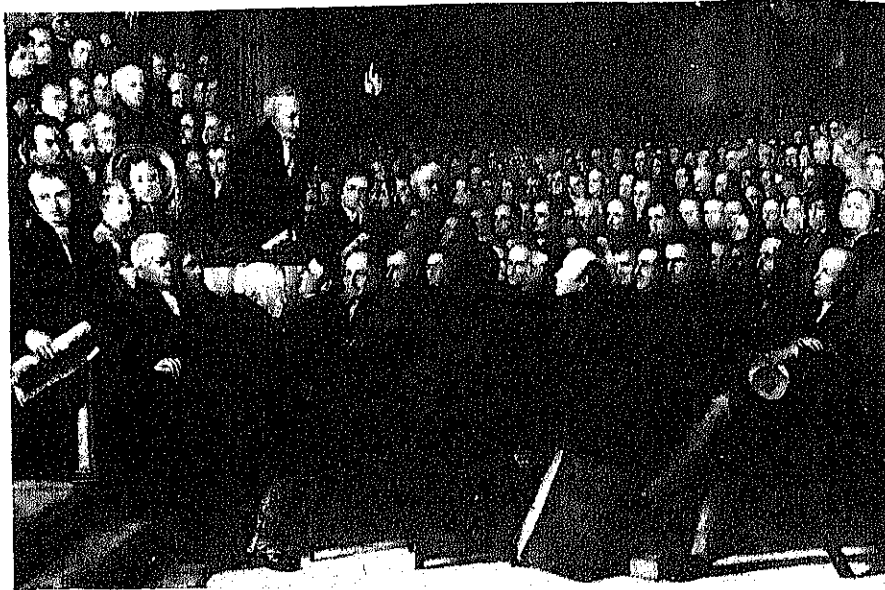
The working people felt, Place tells us, "great disappointment at being abandoned by those whom they had supported to the utmost of their power, and for whom *they* had carried the Bills. The consequence of this was the total abandonment of all reliance upon the middle class to an extent which never before was entertained by them." It seemed obvious that if the working people were to have a chance, they must, either by the use of force, or by a further extension of the franchise to members of their own class, obtain a full share of power. Political reform seemed to be the first step towards economic liberation.

In the year 1800, was born in the little fishing village of Newlyn, near Penzance, a child destined to play a big part in the formulation and furtherance of a demand, or political programme, that seemed to fit the immediate need of the dissatisfied workers. This child was William Lovett, the son of a Captain of a little trading vessel, who was drowned before the child's birth. Lovett's mother lived by hawking fish. When he was thirteen, he was apprenticed for seven years to rope-making, and in 1821 he came to London to seek work. After many hardships, he managed to get a job in a non-Society cabinet-maker's shop; and five years later was admitted as a member of the Cabinet-Maker's Society, eventually becoming its President. In London, Lovett was attracted by the social theories of Robert Owen; but, unlike Owen, he was convinced that political emancipation—that is, universal suffrage—was an essential preliminary to the securing and maintaining of social and economic equality. In 1836, he founded a society known as the London Working Men's Association. Of this society, Lovett acted as secretary; and though its ordinary members were working men, it elected as honorary members certain social reformers of another class, including one who played an important part in their deliberations—the not very successful Charing Cross tailor, already referred to, called Francis Place.



WILLIAM LOVETT

Engraving by A. Harral after Anelay, 1847



CONVENTION OF THE ANTI-SLAVERY SOCIETY, 1840
Oil painting by B. R. Haydon

It is said that it was Place who drew up the celebrated "People's Charter," in which were set forth the famous Six Points ; though there is some doubt if the Charter was not actually drafted by Lovett. The Six Points were very moderate in aim ; they read tamely enough nowadays : (1) Manhood Suffrage. (2) Voting by secret ballot. (3) Payment of members. (4) Annual Parliaments. (5) Abolition of Property Qualification for M.P.'s. (6) Equal electoral districts.

Three names, not so far mentioned, come into great prominence in connection with the Chartist movement at this time—Feargus O'Connor, a brilliant speaker ; O'Brien, a revolutionary intellectual ; and a dismissed Wesleyan minister, the Rev. J. R. Stephens, an effective demagogue, apparently sincere in heart and unbridled in speech. D. J. Holyoake said of him : "To his just and generous mind the grievances of the poor were intolerable, and he was for redressing them ; and if not redressed by the humanity of those in authority, then he was for redressing them by combination, by public agitation, and by whatever agencies he believed to be justifiable in the sight of God." Gammage, the contemporary historian of the Chartist movement, gives us two examples of Stephens's oratory. Pointing once to a monster mill, he exclaimed : "You see yonder factory, with its towering chimney ; every brick in that chimney is cemented with the blood of women and little children." On



A CHARTIST RIOT IN 1839 : AN ATTACK ON THE WESTGATE INN, NEWPORT
Contemporary engraving

another occasion he said : " If the rights of the poor are trampled under-foot, then down with the throne, down with the aristocracy, down with the bishops, down with the clergy, burn the church, down with all rank, all title, and all dignity."

The weak point in the propaganda of Stephens and many other demagogues lay in the absence of constructive plans on which there could be general agreement. There was a physical force party, led by the Birmingham group. Gammage and O'Brien believed in physical force as necessary to dislodge the middle classes from their privileged position ; but they considered it useless to resort to force without elaborate preparation. At a meeting held in 1838, 15,000 people joined in a procession. Stephens was the chief speaker. Banners were carried, inscribed with such exhortations as " He that hath no Sword, let him sell his garment and buy one " ; " Tyrants believe and tremble." Stephens urged the people to buy more pistols, pikes and any other weapons, that they might the more effectively meet the ruling classes. Lovett appealed to his followers on very different lines :

" Brethren, in addressing you as fellow-labourers in the great cause of human liberty, we would wish to rivet this important truth on your mind. You must become your own social and political regenerators, or you will never enjoy freedom. For true liberty cannot be conferred

by Acts of Parliament or decrees of princes, but must spring up from the knowledge, morality, and public virtue of our population. . . . Though revolution were to follow revolution, and changes were to be continually effected in our constitution, laws and government, unless the social and political superstructure were based upon the intelligence and morality of the people, they would only have exchanged despotism for despotism, and one set of oppressors for another."

In another address, issued about the same time, he said :

"It is not the mere possession of the franchise that is to benefit our country—that is only the means to a just end—the election of the best and wisest of men to solve a question which has never yet been propounded in any legislative body—namely, how shall all the resources of our country be made to advance the intellectual and social happiness of every individual?"

In 1848, the Chartist movement became disintegrated ; but, from its several groups, with their distinctive methods and ideals, gradually evolved such present-day organisations and activities as the Workers' Educational Association, the Christian Socialists, the International and later, the Independent Labour group, the Fabian Society and the Labour Party.

Most of the rebellions and nearly all even of the reforms mentioned in these pages have been backed by individuals, not themselves suffering from the grievances which they aimed at removing. Genuine philanthropy is a real thing in human life. Among such philanthropists, free from the cant appertaining to the class so justly pilloried by Harriet Martineau, are William Wilberforce—who, more than anyone else, was responsible for the abolition of the slave trade in the British Empire—John Howard and Elizabeth Fry, to whom we owe the removal of the worst abuses of our prison system ; and Florence Nightingale, the pioneer of modern hospital management and nursing.

Wilberforce proposed a Bill preventing further importation of African negroes into the Colonies. This was defeated by a majority of seventy-five votes ; the Tories, so helpful in getting the early Factory Acts passed, being mostly hostile to it. In 1807, however, the Whigs, who, under Fox, had succeeded the Tories in office, passed by overwhelming majorities an Act abolishing the slave trade. It is interesting that this great reform, whilst in so large a measure due to the fundamental piety and oratorical sincerity of Wilberforce, was equally a triumph for public opinion.

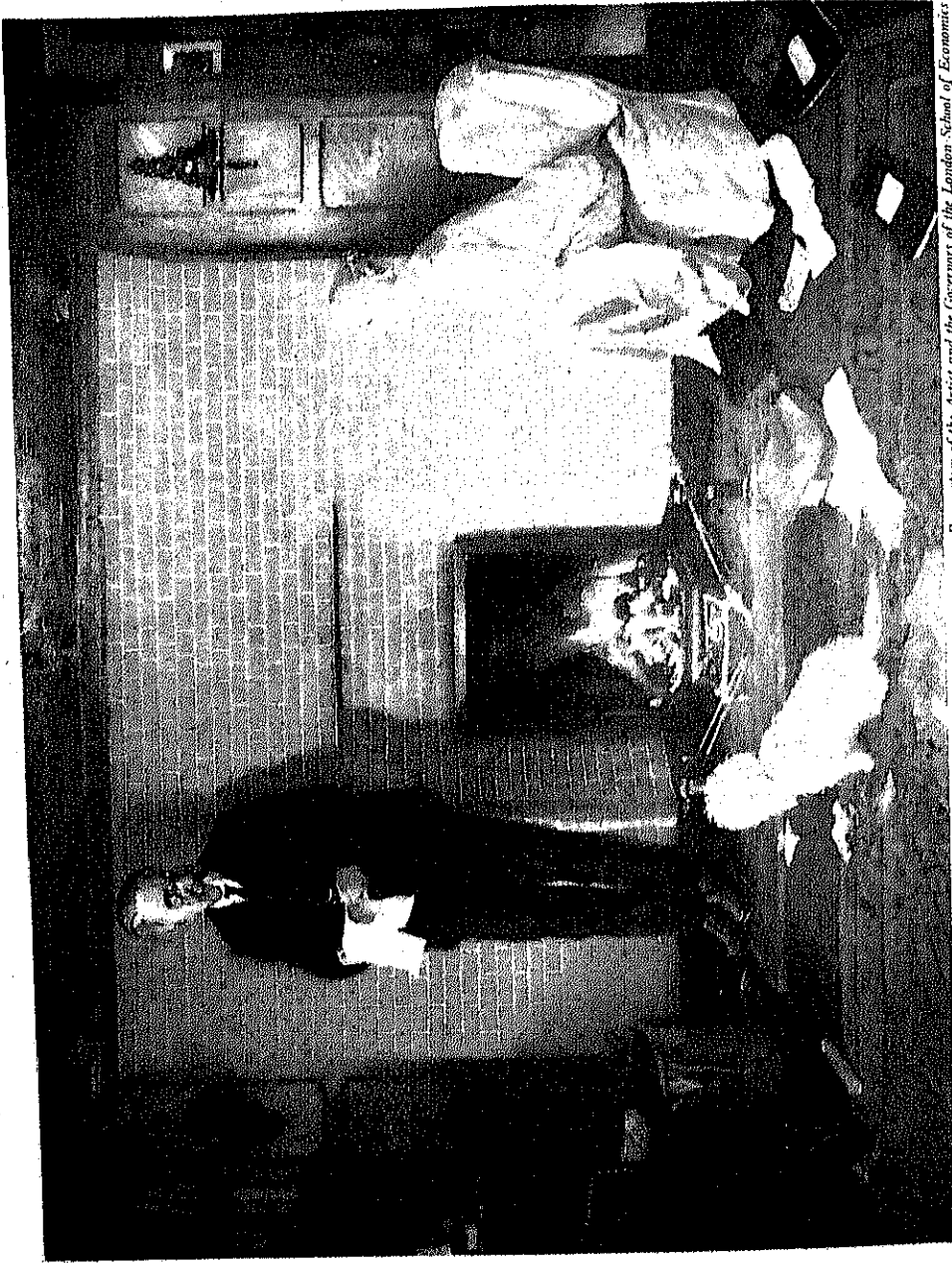
Even in this short history, a few pages at least should be given to those heroines who, in the nineteenth and present centuries, have broken through the tradition of ages and have shown that women share in the common demands of humanity and are capable of producing from among their ranks individuals as courageous, as thorough and as zealous in the cause of social reform as have been the greatest and bravest men. Nor should we forget the contribution to democracy made by women, from Mary Wollstonecraft who, in 1792, published her revolutionary



By courtesy of Quinton Gurney, Esq.

ELIZABETH FRY READING THE BIBLE TO PRISONERS IN NEWGATE, 1816

Oil painting by Jerry Barrett



By courtesy of the Artists and the Governors of the London School of Economics

SIDNEY AND BEATRICE WEBB, NOW LORD AND LADY PASSFIELD

and angry but ill-written and grandiloquent book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*—pleading for a revolution in thought, so that a member of her sex might “obtain a character as a human being”—to Mrs. Pankhurst and her daughters, to whose enthusiastic campaign of pin-pricks is mainly due the ultimate enfranchisement of women by a Government, the leading members of which were in heart opposed to it.

The recognition of women as citizens, entitled equally with men to legal rights, responsibilities and status, cannot, however, be attributed entirely to the deliberate efforts of the Suffragists and the philosophic asserters such as John Stuart Mill, of women’s rights. In large measure, it is the fruit of the spontaneous appreciation by the public of the great work done for humanity by women little concerned with sex differences and with the artificial social disqualifications of women. It would be difficult to exaggerate the extent to which the public mind has been influenced in this matter by the work of such women as Elizabeth Fry and Florence Nightingale.

Elizabeth Gurney, afterwards Mrs. Elizabeth Fry, was born in Norwich in 1780. During her girlhood, she lived the life of a rich young woman in a country town, popular and attractive, a recognised figure at dances and on horseback, “pacing through Norwich streets in showy riding-habit and scarlet boots.” She married at twenty, came to London, became a stricter Quaker and, for thirteen years, devoted herself almost entirely to bringing up her young family. It was in 1813, when she was thirty-three, that she was taken to see Newgate. Here is a report of this event, by Harriet Martineau who, years afterwards, accompanied her on a subsequent visit to the prison :

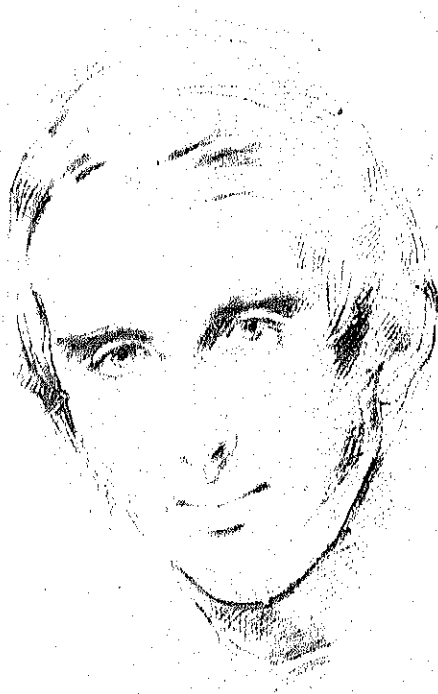
“The spectacle of three hundred women—and such women—crowded together, with swarms of their children, in dirt, idleness and noise, amidst constant clamour and quarrelling, was enough to send anybody home impressed and appalled. The difference between Mrs. Fry and other women was that she immediately imagined she could do something to mitigate the horror. It was winter-time, the cold was severe, and many of the women were lodged on the floor without sufficient covering. She began with making them more comfortable ; and her gifts and her visits together presently improved their manners. They were glad to see her, and were less noisy and rude in her presence. . . . By degrees, she taught them, and she employed a few who were willing. I can remember something of the way in which this was received in society. Gentlemen agreed after dinner that there was something very wild in such projects ; they admired the lady’s courage, but there were many ways of doing good—as no one could tell better than the Gurneys—which were safe and well-explored ; and this eccentricity was a pity. The ladies spoke more strongly. A woman ought to have enough to do at home ; it would turn out that she neglected her daughters and displeased Mr. Fry ; there was something offensive in such parade of philanthropy, and so on. In three or four

years, however, the Governor of Newgate and the Sheriffs of London were so far won that they gave her liberty to do what she could in the prison, though they could not assist her."

Mrs. Fry got together a committee of educated women and gave them a chance of helping in the work she was doing. The voice of opposition was stilled. Daily schools were started in the prison and a workshop established. The absence of sentimentality, the practical efficiency, and the genuine sentiments of fellowship and of justice that characterised the work of Elizabeth Fry can but strike the reader as having much in common with the characteristics of Florence Nightingale, diverse as were the temperaments of the two women.

Mention should here be made of the important part played by the great artists, especially the poets, in the forming and popularising—occasionally in the originating—of revolutionary social ideas. Langland in the fourteenth century and Milton in the seventeenth are notable examples. In the early part of the nineteenth century, we have the two very distinct voices of Blake and Shelley; and, fifty years later, we meet, in John Ruskin and William Morris, the pioneers of a whole army of writers and craftsmen, hoping and working for a standard of social life higher than that current to-day. Ruskin held that "the essence of wealth is in its power over man, and the grandeur of wealth is to make men better and happier—the final outcome and consummation of all wealth is in the producing as many as possible full-breathed, bright-eyed and happy-hearted human creatures." It seems incredible that Ruskin's *Unto this Last*, which first appeared, serially, in the *Cornhill Magazine* in 1860, aroused such a storm of protest that its publication was discontinued.

One of the most interesting episodes and, in its outcome, one of the most important in our recent social history was the meeting together, in 1882, of a small group of people, for mutual enlightenment on the inter-relation of ethics and social reform. The idea with which they started seems to have been the possible reconstruction of social life on the basis of a higher morality than that which at present obtained. The majority of the members, numbering about a dozen, soon came to the conclusion that material considerations, as well as ethical abstractions, must be taken into account if their studies were to have any practical outcome. Accordingly, in 1884, this majority became detached from the earlier "Fellowship of the New Life," and reconstituted itself as the Fabian Society. The name "Fabian" was adopted because the tactics it was proposed to copy were those of the Roman general, Fabius Cunctator. Mr. Frank Podmore, who was one of the early members, invented this motto, which for long passed as a quotation from some unknown classic writer: "For the right moment we must wait, as Fabius did, when warring against Hannibal; but when the time comes



JOHN RUSKIN, 1819-1900
Chalk drawing by George Richmond

we must strike hard, as Fabius did, or our waiting will be in vain and fruitless." The idea of the newly formed society was to study the problems which the introduction of socialism and the conduct of a socialist state would involve. Ethically, the members were already converts to socialism; though the term remained for most of them indefinite.

Their ultimate goal differed in no fundamental way from that of the existing semi-socialist society, the Democratic Federation, led by H. M. Hyndman. The Democratic Federation was a linear descendant of the Chartist movement, and its programme was, at first, almost entirely political; the only socialist demand being for the nationalisation of the land. Several prominent Socialists, however, including Belfort Bax and William Morris, poet and artist, joined its ranks; and the name of the organisation was, in 1884, changed to the Social Democratic Federation. At the end of that year, an important section of the members left the S.D.F. and formed the Socialist League; Morris, Belfort Bax, Walter Crane and Eleanor Marx—daughter of Karl Marx—among the number.

Roughly, the two groups may be defined respectively as the revolutionary social democrats, prepared to use parliamentary weapons and, if these failed, other means, for the attainment of their ideal; and the anti-parliamentary socialists, who believed that all existing institutions—parliamentary and other—had for their object the preservation of capitalist society; and that any kind of reform, short of revolution, merely meant delay in facing realities.

Among the earliest members of the Fabian Society were several men and some women destined to play a large part in British political thought and political action; but the two members to whom the Fabian Society and the cause of Socialism and social reform owe most, are Mr. Sidney Webb and Mr. Bernard Shaw. Both, though now octogenarians, are still alive; and both are recognised as distinguished leaders of thought. Among the other early members were Mrs. Annie Besant, Graham Wallas and Sidney Olivier, all with subsequent distinguished careers.

In 1896, the Society published a Report on Fabian Policy which it had presented to the International Socialist Workers and Trade Union Congress held in London in that year. A few extracts from that Report make clear the mission which the members had undertaken, the tactics they had then decided to employ, and their attitude to abstract ideals and social compromise:

"The object of the Fabian Society is to persuade the English people to make their political constitution thoroughly democratic, and so to socialise their industries as to make the livelihood of the people entirely independent of private Capitalism. It has no distinctive opinions on the Marriage question, Religion, Art, abstract Economics, historic Evolution, Currency, or any other subject than its own special business of practical Democracy and Socialism. It brings all the pressure and persuasion in its power to bear on existing forces, caring nothing by what name any party calls itself, or what principles, Socialist or other, it professes; but having regard solely to the tendency of its actions, supporting those which make for Socialism and Democracy, and opposing those which are reactionary. It does not propose that the practical steps towards Social-Democracy should be carried out by itself, or by any other specially organised society or party. It does not ask the English people to join the Fabian Society. . . . The Fabian Society, far from holding aloof from other bodies, urges its members to lose no opportunity of joining them and permeating them with Fabian ideas as far as possible. . . . The Fabian Society is perfectly constitutional in its attitude; and its methods are those usual in political life in England. The Fabian Society begs those Socialists who are looking forward to a sensational historical crisis, to join some other society. . . . The Fabian Society does not put Socialism forward as a panacea for the ills of human society, but only for those produced by defective organisation of industry and by a radically bad distribution of wealth."



GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
Caricature by Edmund Dulac

By thousands of lectures given by informed members of the Society, in halls and meeting-places throughout the country, and even more by the wide dissemination of well-written and factually accurate pamphlets on almost every political and economic issue, the Fabian Society has unostentatiously influenced the course of social legislation in England, during the last forty years, to a far greater degree than has been achieved

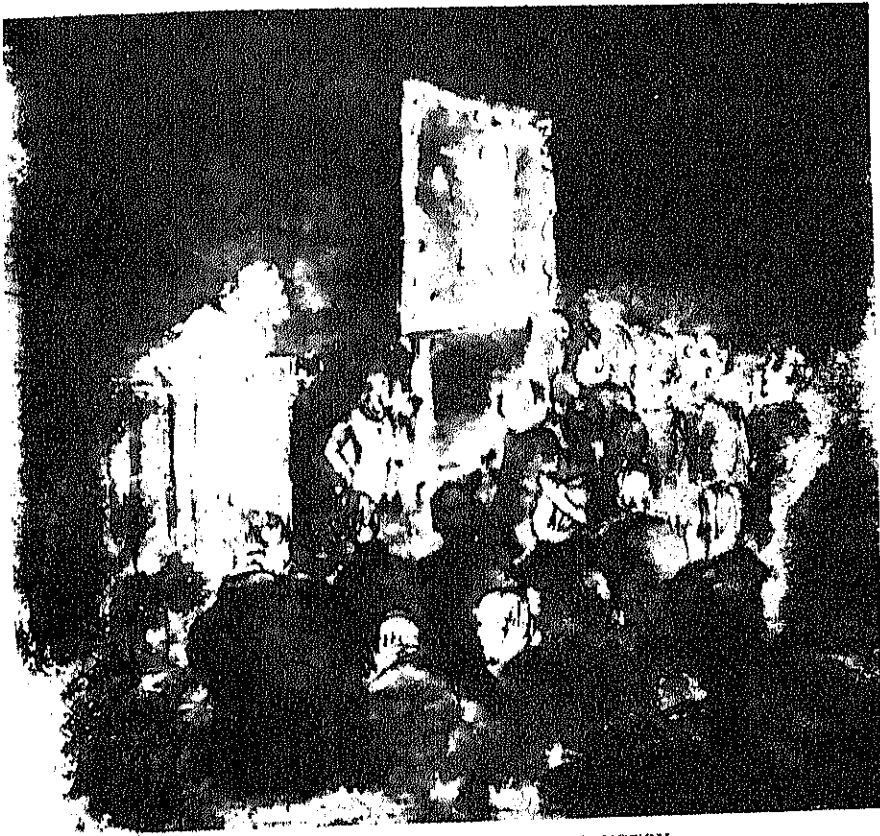
by any comparable organisation. The personal credit for this impressive result must be assigned to Sidney Webb, to his wife, Beatrice Webb, and to the brilliant Irishman, Bernard Shaw.

Directly and indirectly, the Society so acted on public opinion—that of the educated classes as well as of the wage earners—that all political parties have been driven to include in their electoral programmes promises of increased amenities for the poor by progressive taxation of the well-to-do—what Joseph Chamberlain called “the gospel of ransom.” Outstanding examples of the type of legislation referred to are the Old Age Pensions Act and the Acts providing for Health and Unemployment Insurance so energetically sponsored by Mr. Lloyd George. It is certain that the general standard of “reasonable amenities” within reach of the majority of working families to-day is very much nearer to that of the middle classes than it was half a century ago. And it is slowly, but surely, being realised by the more intelligent workers that, as St. Simon said, “the law which constitutes the powers and the form of government is less important and has less influence on the happiness of nations than that which constitutes property and decides its use.”

Few property owners to-day regard their wealth with that full measure of egocentric complacency which characterised so many in the days of George Eliot and Charles Kingsley. Even in the 1870's, William Morris was able, without ridiculous exaggeration, to say, in his Manifesto to the Working Men of England: “I doubt if you know the bitterness of hatred against freedom and progress that lies at the hearts of a certain part of the richer classes in this country. These men cannot speak of your order, of its aims, of its leaders, without a sneer or an insult. These men, if they had the power, would thwart your just aspiration, and would deliver you, bound hand and foot, forever to irresponsible capital.” Yet we must not assume that these rich men were all without conscience.

As Harold Laski puts it, “Property owners assumed with full sincerity an assault upon the privileges by which they lived was in fact an assault upon the basis of civilization. They no more doubted the moral of their attitude than did those who fought the French Revolution against the Russian bourgeoisie when it sought to hurl Lenin from power. . . Liberalism has always suffered from its inability to realise that possessions mean power over men and women as well as over nations.”

At this moment of the world's history, it is practically useless to make any prophecies as to social relations and social progress in the years to come. That is unfortunate, because we seem to have arrived at a point when such internal harmony and happiness as is humanly attainable could be brought about without resort to rebellion and civil strife. Given universal suffrage, desirable reforms demanded by the majority could, it would seem, be effected by the peaceful methods of discussion



A POLITICAL MEETING IN KENSINGTON
Wash drawing by W. Ohly, 1936

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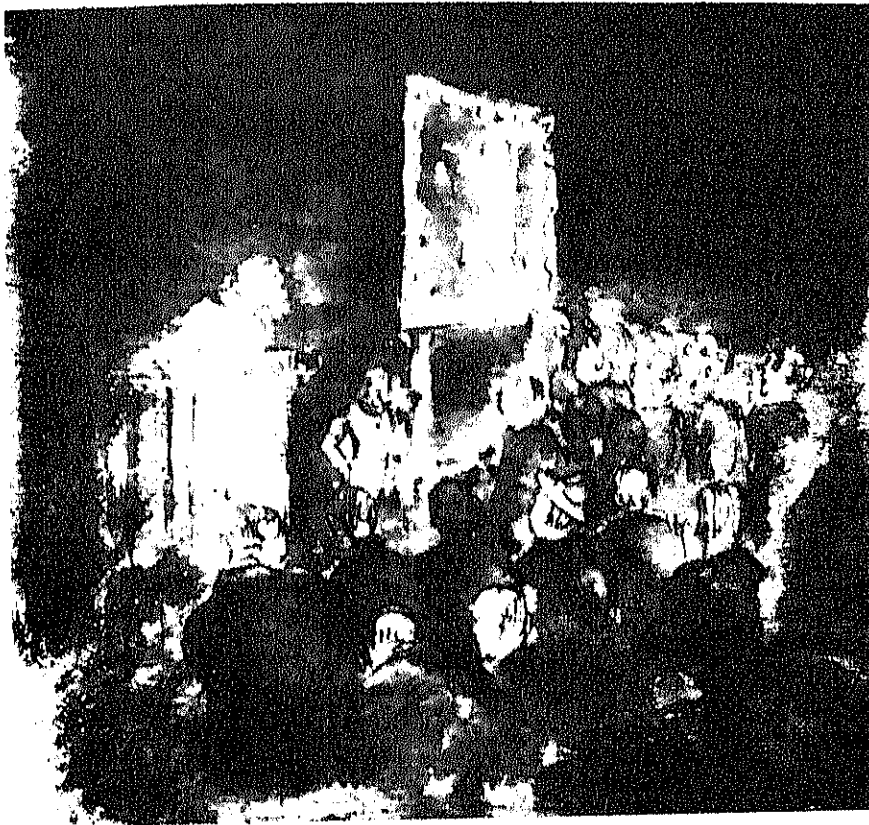
Unfortunately, apart from the existing world chaos, there are circumstances calculated to check undue optimism. A democratic industrial system in which the majority of the people are little interested is not worth contemplating. Our present political and industrial situation in large measure represents the fruit of certain individual master minds of our race. Everything depends on the people we choose on our behalf and in the common interest to take command—our elected representatives in parliament and on local bodies, and those chosen to manage our factories and workshops. The actual work of the world will continue

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to be done—as it always has been done—by individual men and women. Very much depends on the honesty and intelligence of those leaders, political and industrial, who have the ear of the public ; but even more will depend on the capacity of the majority of the people to recognise exceptional talent and character, to appreciate their importance, and to utilise them for the common good. The unequal distribution of wealth in England has led to a number of false and treacherous ideals. Among the well-to-do classes, a standard of material luxury has been built up which, were it generally adopted, would render unattainable the finer manifestations of the mind and spirit of man. Efficient production will have little ultimate value, even in promoting human happiness, if it be accompanied by inefficient and vulgar consumption. In a true scale of values, liberty, security, and reasonable leisure stand far higher than mere luxury.

In the light of all this, perhaps the reform calling for most urgent attention is that of our whole system of education. Someone has said that the only real class distinction in England is based on education ; but, in pressing for equality, let us beware of the crude fallacy of confusing equality with identity. And here, as with material well-being, it is not at pulling down the established and successful to a common level that we should aim, but at a raising towards the highest attainable common standard—financial, cultural and hygienic—without lessening scope for the exercise of unusual individual talent or originality. Lastly, in all our political thinking and scheming, it should never be forgotten that politics, ultimately, is concerned, not with States and abstract policy, but with men and women who are born, see visions, fall in love and die.

